

**Writers as Observers of the World:**  
**Turning the Ordinary into Poetic**

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**My Thinking as a Teacher-**

As my students begin to learn more about poetry through mentor texts and expert voices, I want them to practice two basic tenets of poetry. First, poets must be observers of the world. They notice what others don't: spider webs on the grass in the morning, the way a teacher fiddles with her necklace pendant, the way the sun shines through a window at a certain time of day. Secondly, they are learning about the basic poetic devices- how to identify them and how to employ them in their own poetry. This lesson provides a safe place for students to experiment with the poetic devices with room to write about the topic or observation of their choice. I see possibilities in this lesson for writing across the curriculum. Students could easily "observe" a painting of the Revolutionary War or the transformation of tadpoles into frogs. If we desire for students to demonstrate thinking in their writing, why not observe how an algebraic equation is solved through metaphor or personification of numbers? My focus for this lesson will not be on the identification of the poetic devices, but on how to think and write poetically about the world around us.

**Expert Voices-**

Atwell, N. (2002). *Lessons that Change Writers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Heard, G. (1999). *Awakening the Heart*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Fletcher, R. (2002). *Poetry Matters: Writing a Poem From the Inside Out*. New York: Harper Collins.

McVeigh-Schultz, J., & Ellis, M.L. (1997). *With a Poet's Eye*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

"We've found that writing poetry allows students to experience other subject areas more deeply." (p. xii)

"We ask children to "translate the world" into poetry, we want them to open their eyes. We want them to see that their lives are filled with objects, events, and people, to realize that poets often look at what is right in front of their faces and, through their art, reveal the ordinary world in all its extraordinary beauty and detail." (p. 13)

### **Unit of Study: Poetry**

**Background:** Students have recently learned/reviewed the poetic devices, and this will be one of their first opportunities to apply them to their writing. This lesson is adapted from Georgia Heard's "6 Room Poem." Students will have already created heart maps for ideas and will be keeping observations in their writer's notebooks.

### **Lesson Objectives:**

1. Students will be able to make observations about the world around them.
2. Students will be able to correctly use poetic devices including simile, metaphor, personification, repetition, and onomatopoeia.
3. Students will complete this pre-writing device and use it to translate their observations into a poem that employs the poetic devices.

**Materials:** Fletcher's *Poetry Matters*, handout- 8 Room Poem, possibly provide an image or an artifact or allow students to venture outside.

### **Procedure:**

"I do"-

1. Begin by reviewing what we've been learning about poetry so far. What things are students noticing and recording in their writer's notebooks? Share Ralph Fletcher's thoughts

(p. 26) and read "Clothesline". Briefly discuss the images brought to mind.

2. Share my observation of Luke. Talk about the poetic possibilities in this ordinary but extraordinary moment. Show 8 room organizer, and review the poetic devices used while going through my thought process.

#### **"We do"-**

3. Choose an image or a video to share with the class and pass out 8 room organizer. In table groups, work together, moving from room to room, seeing the image in different lights.
4. Share and record on Smartboard. Save this for tomorrow's lesson.

#### **"You do"-**

5. Use your observations from your writer's notebooks, a picture that I've brought, or a clear memory you have and complete a new 8 room organizer on your own.
6. This could be assigned as homework, **or** I might simply ask students to come to class with the "image" box filled in, so they can work on the rest with guidance the next day.

#### **Wrap-up**

7. Bring students back together. Ask- which poetic device is easiest to use? Which is giving you trouble? Ask students to try to fill each box, and let them know that when they compose their poems, they will decide whether or not to use that room or not.

**Subsequent lessons-** After students have their organizers complete and have demonstrated correct use of the poetic devices, guide them through the assembly of these images into a poem. Share my example (or write it together), and other examples from Georgia Heard, Nancie Atwell and Ralph Fletcher.

#### **Variations:**

6 Rooms- Image, Light (color), Sound, Questions, Feelings, Repeating words

4 Rooms- Memory, Sounds, Feelings, Now (realizations/ understandings)

## **Appendices –**

### **Eagle Flight** by Georgia Heard

Eagle gliding in the sky,  
Circling, circling way up high—  
Wind is whistling through your wings.  
You're a graceful kite with no string.

(p. 90)

### **Clothesline** by Ralph Fletcher

There's an orange towel and  
two white t-shirts pinned  
at the waist all trying to  
dry themselves in the breeze.

Filled with air the two t-shirts  
puff up with sudden bodies  
real and muscular which  
vanish when the wind  
dies.

The wind lifts the towel until  
it lies horizontal as if trying  
to screw up the nerve to let go and  
fly

(p. 26)